

February 14, 2023

Dear Senators and Representatives,,

This correspondence comes to you from West River Valley Thrives, Vermont Kids Against Tobacco (VKAT) and Our Voices Xposed (OVX) of Leland and Gray Union Middle/High School in Townshend, VT. Our groups work to educate peers, the community and policy makers about the harmful effects of tobacco/nicotine products, and about the tobacco industry's targeting of youth and marginalized populations.

It is a fact that:

- more than 1 in 4 Vermont high schoolers have tried flavored tobacco products.
- 97% of youth who vape use flavored products.
- Tobacco and vape companies target youth with colorful, tempting, flavored products.
- Youth are 3 times more likely to smoke menthol cigarettes than adults.

According to the FDA, menthol is easier for young people to start using, and more difficult for adults to quit. Menthol is the only flavoring left out of the national flavor ban of 2009. In 2021, the FDA committed to regulating menthol to "help significantly reduce youth initiation, increase the chances of smoking cessation among current smokers, and address health disparities experienced by communities of color, low-income populations, and LGBTQ+ individuals, all of whom are far more likely to use these tobacco products." Further, the colors, packaging, flavoring, and media influencers used by vape companies are carefully chosen to target all of the aforementioned communities.

Please view this moving video produced by the American Heart Association illustrating one black man's experience of being targeted by the tobacco industry:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHDkmc9gxkk>

The NAACP, the National Center for Black Health and Equity, the Association of Black Cardiologists, The Black Women's Health Imperative, The AMA, The American Lung Association, The American Heart Association and the CDC-funded National LGBT Cancer Network all support the elimination of menthol and flavorings in tobacco and nicotine products. Here are the important takeaways:

- 1) Menthol products have been disproportionately marketed to Black Americans for more than 5 decades, are easier for children to start with, and harder to quit.
- 2) The national organizations of the NAACP and the National Center for Black Health and Equity as well as others support a menthol ban.
- 4) We know that menthol products are being aggressively marketed to our friends and neighbors in Vermont, and that the industry as a whole mails coupons for cigarettes overwhelmingly to non-smokers.
- 5) We know that the nearby states of New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island will NOT wait on the FDA and have successfully implemented bans on these products.

Our hope in sharing these facts and our voices is to empower, remind and educate elected officials about the predatory practices of the tobacco industry, their lifelong harmful effects on youth, and the undeniable truth that our LGBTQ+ and black friends, families, and neighbors are being disproportionately targeted with death-dealing products.

Thank you for your time and service to the people and state of Vermont. Together we can continue the work of making it a healthier place to live each day.

Sincerely,

The Students and Adults of VKAT, OVX, and Leland and Gray Union Middle/High School

Kyleigh Corriveau
Sierra Chris
Jacob Howe
Natalie King
Kaylee Reichardt
Ryan Travers
Aubree Chapman
Danielle Whitham
Mackson WELLS
Keighan Eaker
Jerimiah Matyas
Sopia Hall
Collete Davey
Lenore Whitham
Jenna Greebaum
Tammy Clausen

Uriah Woodruff
Kyla Bloom
Sopia Thurston
Josanna Pansino
Angelica Davey
Spencer Clausen
Ella Meeks
Jesse Olsen
Scarlette Rose
Issabell Reyes
Braydyn Damon
Dylan Hazelton
Lucy Bertram
Jennifer Sequeira
Lucia Stafford
Sopia Hallock
Meadow Lyric

Bela Vanni-Phillips
Skai Beech
Kathryn Chowning
Frank Flood
Kayden Mchinley
Lily Loglyn
Cheyane Berrie
Gigi Birti
Abby Dunn
Jessica Pruit
Julia Devine
Emma Hagan
Jasper Royals
Kayla Jager